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SUBJECT: Codel Voinovich Meeting with Prime Minister Olmert

11. Summary: On January 2, Codel Voinovich met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. Senator Voinovich was accompanied by Representatives Rob Bishop (R, Utah); Phil Gingrey (R, Georgia); Steve Pearce (R, New Mexico) and Michael Turner (R, Ohio) as well as by the Charge and emboff note taker. The hour long meeting was frank and occasionally contentious and focused on border issues with Egypt, housing tenders in East Jerusalem and continued US support for Israel and the ongoing peace process. End Summary

12. Senator Voinovich began the meeting by recounting the last time he saw Olmert in 2001 and lamented the fact that there had been little progress in the peace process since then until very recently. Voinovich praised the current process which he termed as a Qwonderful opportunityQ for peace and a two state solution. The senator pointed out that Arab support would be key to any solution and asked Olmert about Egyptian performance in safeguarding the border with Gaza. Voinovich pointed out that Egyptian officials had complained to the Codel about Israeli officials privately complementing Egyptian actions in private meetings, but publicly condemning their actions in the press and going so far to circulate video recordings in the US Congress of Egyptian border guards in cahoots with HAMAS elements. Voinovich stated that the Egyptians were concerned that this would damage USG assistance to Egypt and was unfair.

13. Olmert pointedly responded by stating that the Egyptians had Qbetrayed their commitmentsQ under the peace accords and that the private meetings with the Egyptians had been far worse than any reported comments in the media. Olmert denied that the GOI had circulated any video to Congress and implied that Egyptian border forces were riddled with corruption and incompetence. Olmert stated that although the peace accords allowed for as many as 750 troops on the border, the Egyptians could only muster 250 at any one time. Olmert described the smuggling efforts in Gaza as enormous, including heavy arms, ammunition and contraband including narcotics.

14. Voinovich pointed out that a recent US Army Corps of Engineers report indicated that sealing off the Gazan border from Egypt was far more complex than it seems at first blush and that the Egyptians were ready to spend up to 25 million USD to implement the recommendations of the report. Voinovich asked Olmert if Israel and the US or European Union could come up with a matrix and what Egyptian actions would constitute success and that the three sides would monitor progress together. Olmert stated that Israel was Qan adultQ and did not need an Qolder uncleQ to watch out for Israel's security concerns. In fact, responded Olmert, there was already a bilateral and quadrilateral mechanism in place to do so.

However, Olmert did indicate a willingness to consider a trilateral framework for addressing the matter. NOTE: Olmert was apparently referring to General Dayton's four way monitoring group which has not met since the HAMAS takeover of the Gaza.

¶5. Moving onto settlement and outpost activities, Olmert stated that he had given the order that no additional private land would be expropriated and any expansion on the West Bank would have to be directly approved by his office. Responding to the Codel, Olmert explained that this did not apply to the municipality of Jerusalem or natural growth of built up areas.¶ Olmert stated that both the Palestinians and the US Administration were familiar with the GOI's position on settlements and that any Palestinian posturing on this issue was simply a negotiating tactic. Olmert summed up that Har Homa and other expansion in the municipality of Jerusalem was an insignificant issue. Far more pressing stated Olmert was the killing of two off duty IDF soldiers, apparently by terrorists associated with Palestinian Authority security forces. Olmert pointed out that as a result of the murders, there was an outcry for the suspension of talks, but he (Olmert) had no intention of doing so.

¶6. Responding to questions from other members of the Codel, Olmert stated that there was no humanitarian crisis in the Gaza strip, but that he was under no obligation to make my enemies life any easier.¶ Olmert recounted the constant bombardment of Qassam missiles and infiltrators coming from Gaza and that several crossing points were open six days a week to allow Gazans with humanitarian needs to enter Israel. Olmert added that there were no restrictions on humanitarian assistance, and that over 13,000 truckloads of private sector and NGO commodities

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have crossed into Gaza since the HAMAS takeover last June. When questioned on PA President Abbas's public comments concerning IDF actions in Gaza, Olmert stated that the comments were for public consumption and that in fact, Abbas wanted the IDF to take larger, more aggressive action against HAMAS and eliminate as many militants as possible.

¶7. The meeting also touched on the problems that Israel had with the National Intelligence Estimate on Iran's nuclear program and the possibility of opening a dialog with Syria. Each member of Codel Voinovich concluded with a firm commitment to Israel and Israel's security.

¶8. This cable has been cleared by Senator Voinovich.